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The Qur'an and Hermeneutics: Reading the Qur'an's Opposition to Patriarchy¹

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Is Islam a religious patriarchy that has 'God on its side'?² That is, does Islam, and in particular the Qur'an, advocate or condone theories of male rule/privilege and thus also of sexual differentiation, hierarchy, and inequality, as some Muslims and critics of Islam allege; or have we confused it with its patriarchal (mis)readings? My own view is that since, like other sacred texts, the Qur'an is polysemic (has multiple meanings), it is open to variant readings, such that looking to the text itself does little to explain its patriarchal exegesis. Rather, we need to examine both the methods that Muslims have applied to read the Qur'an and also the extra-textual contexts in which they have read it historically. Secondly, I believe that the theological and hermeneutical principles the Qur'an suggests for its own reading, as well as its epistemology, are inherently anti-patriarchal. We can, and should, therefore read it in liberatory modes, especially if we wish to end the oppression of women and to evolve an egalitarian praxis for all Muslims.

In this paper, I summarise salient aspects of my critique of patriarchal readings of the Qur'an and also propose an anti-patriarchal interpretation highlighting the Qur'an's opposition to theories of sexual differentiation and the idea of father/husband right/rule (patriarchy).

Reading Patriarchy into the Qur'an

Those who label Islam a patriarchy rarely ever clarify what they mean by patriarchy itself, even though in the absence of a definition it is impossible to establish (or contest) the legitimacy of such claims. I find it crucial, therefore, to begin by specifying what patriarchy entails in both its traditional/religious and its more modern, secular forms.

In its traditional/religious forms, patriarchy is a form of father right/rule (extending into claims of husband-privilege) that assumes a real and/or symbolic continuum between the 'Father/fathers', i.e. between a patriarchalised view of God (as Father/male) and a theory of father/husband-right.³ Although this form of patriarchy no longer exists in its original form and although Muslims have never sacralised God as Father, this definition can be applied to interpret the Qur'an because it was revealed

to a traditional patriarchy and because Muslims continue to read theories of father/husband right/rule and privilege into its teachings.

In its modern, secular forms, patriarchy is a politics of male privilege based on the idea of sexual differentiation; specifically, it is 'the politics of transforming biological sex into politicised gender, which prioritises the male while making the woman different (unequal),⁴ less than, or the "Other"'.⁵ In other words, modern patriarchy rests on the confusion of sex (biology) with its social constructions (gender) and thus also of sexual differences with gender hierarchies and inequalities. This definition can also be applied to interpret the Qur'an because (Muslim) patriarchies have reconstituted themselves and because Muslims tend to read both sets of confusions (sex with gender, and difference with inequality) into the Qur'an's teachings as well.

There are two ways in which Muslims read theories of father/husband rule/privilege and of sexual differentiation, into the Qur'an. One is on the basis of specific verses; the other is on the basis of the Qur'an's different treatment of women and men with regard to such issues as marriage, divorce, evidence-giving, etc. From these, they infer that God has preferred men to women, made them ontologically superior to women (even if only by a 'degree') and made them women's managers, guardians and rulers, with the right to beat disobedient wives. Although offered by conservative Muslims, this exegesis is also accepted as accurate by most Muslim feminists who then use it to attack Islam as an 'uncompromisingly paternalistic'⁶ and misogynistic religion that 'professes models of hierarchical relationships and sexual inequality', thus putting a 'sacred stamp ... onto female subservience'.⁷ Such views, however, can be faulted for confusing the Qur'an with its (patriarchal) exegesis, thus ignoring the distinction that the Qur'an and also Muslim theology make between Divine Speech and 'its earthly realisation'.⁸ Indeed, not just Muslim theology, but the whole hermeneutic enterprise, to say nothing of feminist (and post-modern) theorising about texts, is based on the view that it not only is possible, but also necessary, to distinguish between texts and their readings, a view that then also allows us to judge between the legitimacy of different readings.

On the other hand, patriarchal readings of the Qur'an can be faulted not only for distorting our idea of God – by displacing onto God the idea of sexual partisanship and thus of sexism and even misogyny – but also for other methodological and conceptual problems. Methodologically, such readings tend to decontextualise the Qur'an's teachings by rendering words, phrases, and *āyāt* in isolation from one another and without attention to language, grammar, and syntax, and/or by generalising specific Qur'anic injunctions. To take a common and particularly egregious example, the 'degree' (*daraja*) that men have been given over women turns out, on a grammatically correct and contextualised reading, to be a reference not to male onto-

logical superiority vis-à-vis women, but to a husband's rights in a *divorce* as becomes clear if we read the relevant *āyah* carefully:

Divorced women shall wait concerning themselves
for three monthly periods. Nor is it lawful for them
to hide what God hath created in their wombs,
if they have faith In God and the Last Day.
And their husbands have the better right
to take them back in that period, if
they wish for reconciliation. And women shall have rights
similar to the rights against them according
to what is equitable but men have a degree [*daraja*]
(of advantage) over them.⁹

Muhammad Asad (1980),¹⁰ Riffat Hassan (1999),¹¹ and Amina Wadud (1999)¹² offer three differing readings of *daraja*, with Asad interpreting it as the husband's right to rescind a divorce, Wadud as his right to pronounce one without outside arbitration, and Hassan as his right to remarry after the divorce without having to observe a waiting period, unlike the wife. In view of the emphasis of the *āyah* on kindness and the possibility of a reconciliation, Asad's reading seems to be the most contextually appropriate. However, even if one does not accept it as such, it should be clear that the *daraja* pertains to a specific right and is not in the nature of a statement about sex/gender differences, hierarchies or inequalities. Indeed, as I argue below, all three notions are missing from the Qur'an.

Similarly, the view that 'Men are the managers of the affairs of women because Allah has made the one superior to the other',¹³ reads into the Qur'an themes of sexual inequality and male privilege that are missing from it. This also becomes clear if one reads the pertinent *āyah* in its entirety:

Men are the protectors and maintainers [*qawwamūn 'alā*] of women, because God has given the one more (strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means. Therefore the righteous women are devoutly obedient [*qānitāt*], and guard in (the husband's) absence what God would have them guard. As to those women on whose part ye fear disloyalty and ill-conduct [*nushūz*], admonish them (first), (next), refuse to share their beds, (and last) beat them (lightly) [*ḍaraba*]. But if they return to obedience, seek not against them means (of annoyance) . . .¹⁴

As several scholars have noted, *qawwamūna 'alā* means financial maintainers (bread-winners), not managers, guardians, or rulers. Moreover, in that men are only

‘“*qawwamūn*” over women in matters where God gave some of the men more than some of the women, *and* in what the men spend of their money, then clearly men *as a class* are not “*qawwamūn*” over women as a class,’ concludes Azizah al-Hibri.¹⁵ By this rule, she argues ‘no one has the right to counsel a self-supporting woman.’¹⁶ And yet, by using the word ‘strength’ to qualify what God has given more of to one than to the other, Yusuf Ali transforms a teaching about men’s financial obligations into a claim about sexual differentiation/inequality. His commentary¹⁷ that the man’s duty ‘to maintain the woman’ also implies ‘a certain difference in nature between the sexes’ is, however, pure conjecture since the Qur’an never frames the issue of maintenance, or male-female relationships, in terms of sexual differences; to the contrary, it stresses repeatedly that women and men are of similar natures (see below).

In this respect, Asad’s rendition of Q.4:34 is clearer: ‘Men shall take full care of women with the bounties which God has bestowed more on some of them than on the others,¹⁸ and with what they may spend out of their possessions.’ That by bounties the Qur’an means material resources is (or should be) evident from the nature of the charge itself: to take care of women. Yet, exegetes through the ages have read into this term the idea that men are superior to women in intelligence, rationality, virtue, etc. even though the Qur’an never makes such claims in *any* context, and even though it is clear that men need financial resources, not just intelligence, strength, etc., in order to maintain women. This is why God also advises those who do not have the means to marry to remain patient until God gives them the means, since an Islamic marriage places specific financial obligations on the husband that it does not place on the wife, for the support of the family.

This does not mean, however, that the Qur’an designates the husband head of the household, as most Muslims hold. Not only does this archaic concept derive from a (European) feudal past, but, as Abdel Haleem¹⁹ points out, the Qur’an teaches the principle of *shūrā*, or mutual consultation, on all issues within the family. Of course, many exegetes have managed to distort this concept as well by arguing that consultation is the man’s prerogative who remains the final arbiter of everything. However, such a view undercuts the very notion of mutuality implicit in the concept of *shūrā*; it also ignores that the Qur’an regards women and men as each other’s *awliyā*’, or protectors/guides/‘in-charge’,²⁰ a clear indication that it envisages a non-hierarchical and reciprocal relationship between women and men based on a mutual recognition of each other’s individuality.

Contrary to popular belief, the Qur’an also does not give husbands a free hand to beat disobedient wives. This idea also arises from misreading the *āyah* quoted above, in particular, the words *qānitāt*, *nushūz*, and *ḍaraba*, which are often read without attention to syntax or to the contexts of their usage both in this *āyah* and more generally

in the Qur'an. Wadud, for instance, notes that the Qur'an uses *qānitāt* to refer to both male and female behaviour towards *God*, and *nushūz* to refer to a state of marital discord, not just to the wife's conduct.²¹ Hassan, on the other hand, argues that the word '*ṣāliḥāt*, which is translated as "righteously obedient,"²² is related to the word *ṣalāḥiyya*, which means "capability" or "potentiality," and not obedience.' She thus reads it as a reference to women's child-bearing potential, suggested by the word *qānitāt*, also a water-container (a metaphor for the womb). In her view, the *āyah* is referring to 'women's role as child-bearers,' and only if they *all* rebel against this role does the Qur'an permit the *community* to '*ḍaraba*' them which, in a legal context, she says, means 'holding in confinement', not beating.

These examples demonstrate, firstly, that one can read the same *āyah* or word in radically different ways, such that we always need to explain (the hegemony of) certain readings rather than taking them as given. Secondly, they show that the methodology Muslims use to read the Qur'an is itself problematic. As Mustansir Mir²³ argues in this context, this method takes a 'verse-by-verse approach' to the Qur'an, such that with 'most Muslim exegetes, the basic unit of Qur'an study is one or a few verses taken in isolation from the preceding and following verses.' As a result, he says,²⁴ exegetes have failed to recognise that the Qur'an possesses both 'thematic and structural *naẓm* [coherence].' Moreover, even when they refer to the relationship of two *āyāt* to one another, argues Wadud,²⁵ most exegetes do so without applying any 'hermeneutical principle' since a method 'for linking similar Qur'anic ideas, syntactical structures, principles, or themes together is almost non-existent.' That such a method cannot yield a 'creative synthesis' of Qur'anic principles is well-known;²⁶ what is less well recognised is that such a method also cannot recover the Qur'an's anti-patriarchal episteme inasmuch as it fails to recognise the connections between seemingly disparate themes, such as between the nature of God's self-disclosure (how God describes God) and theories of father right/rule (see below).

If Muslims have traditionally failed to read the Qur'an as a 'complex hermeneutic totality',²⁷ they have failed also to read it as a 'historically situated'²⁸ text. Thus, even though exegetes acknowledge the historical contexts of the Qur'an's teachings by way of the *asbāb al-nuzūl* (occasions of revelation of specific *āyāt*), most do not examine its contents and contexts together because they believe, wrongly, that contextualising the Qur'an will undermine its universality. As a result, they end up universalising many injunctions that were directed to the seventh-century tribal Arab patriarchy that was the Qur'an's first audience. This practice, however, not only leads to misreading the Qur'an, but it is also harmful to women since some of the severest restrictions against them arise from generalising specific Qur'anic teachings.²⁹

Restrictive and patriarchal readings of the Qur'an also arise from a conceptual error which consists in assuming that because it treats women and men *differently* that it treats them *unequally*. Such a view is problematic for two reasons. Firstly, not only is the confusion of differences with inequality a 'confusion of categories . . . too immoderate' to sustain,³⁰ but it has also been criticised on practical grounds by many theorists, especially feminists. Thus, while feminists initially tended to theorise equality in terms of identical rights/treatment, many now admit that treating women and men alike in every situation can actually exacerbate *inequalities*. As such, the fact that the Qur'an treats men and women differently with respect to certain issues is not in itself proof of its anti-equality stance, especially since, secondly, the Qur'an does not link sex with gender; i.e. it does not teach a theory of gender inequality based on the idea of sexual differences. Thus, while the Qur'an recognises sexual specificity, it does not assign it any gender symbolism;³¹ i.e., it does not invest biological sex with symbolic meaning. For instance, it does not define men in terms of masculine attributes,³² or as opposites of women, or women in terms of feminine attributes,³³ or as opposites of men. In fact, there is no 'concept of woman' or of 'gendered man' in the Qur'an.³⁴ Rather, being 'made in the form of God,' humans 'manifest *the whole*'.³⁵ That is, each embodies so-called masculine and feminine attributes, and *each* manifests the whole. Significantly, however, the Qur'an does not engender humans (or God), and while masculinity and femininity have strongly influenced Qur'anic exegesis, they have done so without explicit Qur'anic sanction.³⁶ However, since the Qur'an itself does not link sex with gender, we also cannot derive theories of sex/gender differentiation, hierarchies, and inequalities from its teachings.³⁷ As such, whatever sexual differences exist between humans could not 'indicate an inherent value,' because, if they did, the concept of 'free will would be meaningless'.³⁸ The idea of free will assumes that humans will exercise it to make better choices, that they are capable of acting as independent moral agents, and that they are not inherently inferior to one another. If we assume that women are in fact inferior to men by nature, then there would be no point in their having free will, since they could never exercise it for higher ends and would be foreordained to be lesser (and perhaps necessarily sinful) persons.

Finally, patriarchal readings of the Qur'an are a function not only of how Muslims have read – or, rather, *failed* to read – it (issues of hermeneutics), but also of *who* has read it and in *what* contexts (issues of sexual/textual³⁹ politics). It may be argued that the Qur'an has been misread as *advocating* a patriarchy rather than merely *addressing* one simply because it 'happens against a long background of patriarchal precedent'.⁴⁰ This may explain why, in the 'creation of the basic paradigms through which we examine and discuss the Qur'an and Qur'anic interpretation,' men's experiences have been included and women and their experiences have either been excluded or

interpreted 'through the male vision, perspective, desire, or needs'.⁴¹ The ensuing absence of women's voices from these paradigms, argues Wadud, is mistaken 'with voicelessness in the text,' and it is this silence that both explains and allows the striking consensus on women's issues among Muslims in spite of interpretive differences between them. However, since women participated in the transmission of religious knowledge in the early years of Islam, and since the Prophet accepted their 'right to speak out and readily responded to their comments',⁴² we must look to the configuration of political and sexual power in Muslim states in order to explain their exclusion from religious and public life over time.

In sum, we must study hermeneutics, history, and sexual/textual politics together in order to understand why Muslims have read the Qur'an in patriarchal modes. Sadly, however, Muslims have rarely done so. As a result, readings of Islam as a patriarchy have become so deeply ingrained in our consciousness that even those whose work goes farthest in showing the anti-patriarchal nature of Qur'anic teachings, believe that the Qur'an is neutral towards 'social and marital patriarchy.'⁴³ However, one can only assume the Qur'an's neutrality toward patriarchy if one is unclear about what patriarchy is. More to the point, one can only assume the Qur'an to be neutral towards patriarchy if one fails to base one's reading of it in a theologically sound understanding of God. Thus, since there is perfect congruence between God's Being (divine ontology) and God's Speech (divine discourse), we must begin by *connecting them*. This will allow us to derive the theological and hermeneutic keys for reading the Qur'an from the text itself, specifically from its conception of the Divine. In this context, I believe that the very nature of divine ontology, or rather, divine self-disclosure (how God describes God)⁴⁴ is itself anti-patriarchal in nature and therefore the strongest argument against reading the Qur'an as a patriarchal text. We therefore need to make God's self-disclosure the epistemological foundation of an anti-patriarchal hermeneutics of the Qur'an.

An Anti-Patriarchal Qur'anic Hermeneutics

If all meaning is contextual, hence contingent,⁴⁵ then the meanings we derive from or ascribe to a text depend on how we read it; i.e., on the questions we ask of it and the 'voices' we (prefer to) hear in response to our questions. It is therefore not 'enough to ask *what* we know about religion, but equal attention must be paid to *how* we come to know what we know'.⁴⁶ We need, that is, to explore the relationship between the content of (religious) meaning and the methods by which it is generated since, as I have argued, different methods can generate different meanings from the same text.

In this context, I believe that we can only read the Qur'an in anti-patriarchal modes if we ask the right sorts of questions of it. However, even more importantly, we can only read the Qur'an in anti-patriarchal modes if we bring into our readings the right

theological sensibility. After all, for believers, scripture is divine discourse and how we understand it depends ultimately on how we conceptualise the Divine. Here I briefly explore three aspects of divine self-disclosure that can help us to engage the Qur'an in liberatory modes: these are the principles of divine unity (*tawhīd*), incomparability and justice.

Tawhīd, which is the foundation of Islamic monotheism, holds that there is only one God whose sovereignty is indivisible and cannot be extended to others, even symbolically; the Qur'an says: 'God has said: 'Take not (for worship) two gods for He⁴⁷ is just One God.'⁴⁸ That 'gods' here refers not just to other deities, but also to humans, and even to one's own lower impulses, is clear from the Qur'an's criticism of one who takes 'for his god His own passion (or impulse).'⁴⁹ That 'worship' here means not ritualised prayers, but obedience/submission to anyone other than God is clear from dozens of *āyāt*, some of which I will consider later. Believers, then, cannot split obedience between God and others, nor can they claim for themselves any form of rule/sovereignty over others that displaces, conflicts with, or pretends to be a symbolic extension of God's rule or sovereignty. Theories that misrepresent males as God's surrogates on earth (by drawing on misrepresentations of God as, symbolically, male), or man's rule over women as a symbolic extension of God's rule over humans, or men as intermediaries between God and women, thus are violating the essence of *tawhīd* inasmuch as they are allowing men to draw parallels between themselves and God and, on that basis, to command obedience, and even submission, from women. We must therefore reject such ideas as theologically unsound since the Qur'an cannot possibly condone any idea or theory that undermines the very crux of *tawhīd*.

In truth, of course, innumerable scholars have distinguished themselves by their efforts to justify theories of male rule over women by not only misinterpreting words like *qawwamūn*, but also by drawing on masculinised misrepresentations of God. Tabrisi, for instance, used models of God's rulership over humans to advocate men's rulership over women, even ordering wives to bow down before their husbands.⁵⁰ Similarly, Ashraf Ali Thanawi ranked husbands higher than fathers, equating ingratitude to husbands with ingratitude to God,⁵¹ thus equating husbands with God. However, the concept of *tawhīd* leaves no room for drawing parallels between God and men, or between God's rule and men's rule; to the contrary, it gives us scriptural sanction to reject not only masculinised views of God but also theories of male privilege that derive from such views.

The theologeme of divine incomparability (unrepresentability) also encourages us to reject androcentric and masculinised misrepresentations of God which are integral to asserting man's primacy over women. (As feminists argue, men acquire power from 'the fact that the source of ultimate value is often described in anthropomorphic

images as Father or King.')⁵² However, if – as the Qur'an teaches – God is beyond sex/gender, not only is there no reason to masculinise God, but there is also no reason to assume that God has any particular relationship to, or affinity with, males. Equally critically, we should make the Qur'an's repudiation of a patriarchalised God the *hermeneutic site* from which to recover its anti-patriarchal episteme. That is, we must be willing to locate our hermeneutics in the principle that a God beyond sex/gender cannot be viewed as a model only for males, or for justifying theories of male privilege. Quite simply, if God is not male, there also is no reason to assume that men alone are made in God's image or are, in any way, ontologically privileged over women; on the contrary, as I will argue, the Qur'an teaches the principle of the complete ontological similarity and equality of the sexes.

A third principle of God's self-disclosure that impinges on how we should read the Qur'an is that of divine justice which maintains that God, though 'severe, strict and unrelenting [in] justice . . . never does any *ẓulm* to anybody'.⁵³ The primary meaning of *ẓulm* in the Qur'an, as Izutsu points out, is 'to act in such a way as to transgress the proper limit and encroach upon the right of some other person.'⁵⁴ Since divine justice is based on observing the rights of others, God's speech (the Qur'an) also cannot be read as violating these rights. For instance, if 'God by definition, cannot be a misogynist',⁵⁵ then God's speech, by definition, also cannot be misogynist. If the essence of justice is to observe another's rights, then patriarchies that violate women's rights by justifying sexual hierarchy and oppression are nothing if not manifest cases of *ẓulm* from the viewpoint of women, and cannot be ascribed to God.⁵⁶ We must assume, again as a hermeneutic principle, that the Qur'an cannot condone any form of *ẓulm*, no matter how negligible in the eyes of those who commit it. Readings that, from expedience or habit, ascribe sexual oppression to the Qur'an should be seen as *misreadings* inasmuch as they violate a cardinal principle of God's self-disclosure.

In sum, a liberatory Qur'anic hermeneutics must begin from the self-evident truth that, 'Theologically speaking, whatever diminishes and denies the full humanity of women must be presumed not to reflect the divine or an authentic relation to the divine'.⁵⁷ Only after locating our hermeneutics in this principle should we turn our attention to other methodological criteria for reading the Qur'an and here, too, the Qur'an should serve as our guide. In particular, its emphasis on reading for its best meanings and its support for the principle of textual holism, both of which impinge on issues of con/textual legitimacy (what makes one reading con/textually more appropriate than another) should structure our own methodology.

The Qur'an confirms its own polysemy, as well as the fact that not all its readings may be equally appropriate, by praising 'Those who listen to the Word and follow the best

(meaning) in it,⁵⁸ clearly establishing the need to choose between different readings. The same moral is implicit in God's advice to Mūsa to 'enjoin Thy people to hold fast by the best in the precepts [i.e. the Tablets given to him].'⁵⁹ Although the Qur'an does not say what the best meaning of every *āyah* would be, leaving it open to every new generation of Muslims to make that determination, it lays down some guidelines for making such judgements. At the ethical-moral levels, it emphasises the concepts of justice (*ʿadl*) and the avoidance of *ẓulm*, which we can define as broadly as we want, and certainly broadly enough to rule out sexual inequality. Indeed, at the epistemological and ontological levels, the Qur'an teaches a view of human equality (see below) that should become the basis from which to reread its injunctions about women's and men's rights and relationships. At a methodological level, the Qur'an establishes the need to read it as 'a whole, a totality'⁶⁰ by praising those who say 'We believe in the Book; the whole of it is from our Lord,'⁶¹ and warning those who 'have made [the] Qur'an into shreds (as they please).'⁶² The Qur'an also offers insight into how humans 'shred' God's message by criticising the Israelites for changing 'the words from their (right) places and [forgetting] a good part of the message that was sent them,'⁶³ and for making it 'into (separate) sheets for show, while ye conceal much (of its contents).'⁶⁴ The Qur'an also warns against ignoring its 'basic or fundamental' *āyāt* of 'established meaning' while focusing only on the 'allegorical, seeking discord, and searching for its hidden meanings.'⁶⁵ While allegory has a clear didactic function in the Qur'an, it is meant to clarify, not to obscure, its meanings.

I cannot here consider the full implications of these teachings beyond emphasising that the Qur'an itself gives us sanction to read it for better meanings, as does the very nature of divine self-disclosure.⁶⁶ The Qur'an also suggests that the best meanings cannot be generated by reading it in a selective, piecemeal, and decontextualised way, or by focusing only on its allegorical aspects. Rather, we need to read the text as a whole which allows us also to recognise its hermeneutic, thematic, and structural coherence and interconnections. Such a method, I noted earlier, is also integral to recovering the Qur'an's opposition to patriarchy, as I will now demonstrate.

The Qur'an and Sex/Gender Differentiation

If it is true, as contemporary theorists argue, that modern, secular patriarchies advocate theories of sexual differentiation thus confusing sexual differences with gender inequalities, then not only is the Qur'an not a patriarchal text but its teachings allow us to challenge this mode of patriarchy inasmuch as it does not link sex with gender, or use the concept or language of gender to define humans, or even teach a theory of sexual differentiation. On the contrary, the Qur'an teaches the principle of the complete ontic equality and similarity of the sexes.

To begin with, the Qur'an locates human origins in a single self (*nafs*);⁶⁷ e.g. God 'created you from a single *nafs*, created, of like nature, [its] *zawj* [mate] and from them twain scattered (like seeds) countless men and women';⁶⁸ 'It is He who hath produced you from a single person';⁶⁹ 'It is He who created you from a single person, and made [its] mate of like nature, in order that he might dwell with her (in love);'⁷⁰ 'God has made for you mates (and companions) of your own nature';⁷¹ 'And among His signs is this, that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that ye may dwell in tranquillity with them';⁷² and, 'We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise each other). Verily, the most honoured of you in the sight of God is . . . the most righteous of you.'⁷³

The Qur'an, then, only differentiates between humans on the basis of their moral praxis and not on the basis of their sex. Indeed, by using words like *nafs* and *zawj*, it confirms that women and men are fundamentally similar.⁷⁴ Furthermore, as these *āyāt* show, the similarity and equality of the sexes is ontological and not sociological. This is confirmed also by the fact that the Qur'an does not stipulate a 'hierarchy of being'⁷⁵ based on the idea of the priority of man's (Adam's) creation, unlike the Bible which teaches that 'man is not out of woman but rather woman out of man . . . man was not created for the sake of the woman, but rather woman for the sake of the man'.⁷⁶ This view of the woman as derivative, hence secondary, argue feminists, lies at the core of Christian misogyny.

The Qur'an, however, does not temporalise creation in this way. As Hassan argues,⁷⁷ in the Qur'an 'the term *ādam* refers, in twenty-one cases out of twenty-five, to humanity.' Adam, as she notes, is a Hebrew term and means 'of the soil' (from *adama* – the soil), and usually functions 'as a collective noun referring to "the human" (species) rather than to a male human being.' And it is in its universal sense that the Qur'an uses it to define human creation. Thus, in none of the thirty or more *āyāt* pertaining to creation:

(designated by generic terms such as 'an-nas,' 'al-insan,' and 'bashar') by God in a variety of ways is there any statement which could be interpreted as asserting or suggesting that man was created prior to woman or that woman was created from man. In fact there are some passages which could – from a purely grammatical/linguistic point of view – be interpreted as stating that the first creation (*'nafsin wāḥidatin'*) was feminine, not masculine!⁷⁸

Not only does the Qur'an not prioritise man in its account of creation, but it also does not prioritise him in its account of moral agency and personality. Rather, it teaches that men and women equally are moral agents (*khilāfa*), and both equally are

endowed with the capacity for moral personality, the hallmark of which is the ability to acquire God-consciousness, or *taqwa*. That is why the Qur'an holds out the promise,

For Muslim men and women, for believing men and women, for devout men and women, for men and women who are patient and constant, for men and women who humble themselves, for men and women who give in charity, for men and women who fast (and deny themselves), for men and women who guard their chastity, and for men and women who engage much in God's praise, for them has God prepared forgiveness and great reward.⁷⁹

Women and men, then, are equal in every respect before God, and nowhere does the Qur'an differentiate between them based on their sex. Rather, as I noted, and as Sachiko Murata points out,⁸⁰ Islam only 'distinguishes between those who meet the expectations of God and those who do not; [i.e.] those who live up to the human role in existence and those who do not.'

Inasmuch as the Qur'an does not equate sex with gender, or consider biological differences relevant to its view of human creation, agency, and moral personality, and inasmuch as it does not sexualise difference itself, we cannot view its different treatment of women and men with respect to some issues as evidence of its support for patriarchy or inequality. Rather, the Qur'an's teachings allow us to theorise the radical equality of the sexes if we ourselves wish to do so.⁸¹

The Qur'an and Father/Husband Right/Rule

The Qur'an not only does not teach theories of sex/gender differentiation on which modern forms of patriarchy draw, but it also does not endorse the concept of father/husband right/rule in which traditional patriarchies were based. To understand this point, we need to be aware that the glorification of fatherhood in traditional/religious patriarchies rests on misrepresentations of God as patriarch. As Martin Luther said, 'God the Father is the model of all father figures who require obedience'.⁸² Thus, in traditional (European) patriarchies, a

kingly father reigned whom no man could question for he owed his terrible majesty and legitimacy to no man but to God. All lesser fathers within their little kingdoms had wives and children, or so patriarchal ideology would have it, as their dutiful and obedient subjects even as they, in turn, were the faithful and obedient servants of the fatherly-lord, the king.⁸³

Although this mode of patriarchy was specific to the 'West', the ideology of father/husband right/rule at its core has survived in many cultures, especially Muslim,

which also view husbands and fathers as rulers over wives and children, or at least as heads of households. What is more, such views also draw on masculinist misrepresentations of God, as noted. This is particularly troubling given the Qur'an's vehement rejection of the patriarchal imaginary of God-as-Father, or God-as-male:

Say: He is God the One and Only;
 God, the Eternal, Absolute;
 He begetteth not, nor is He begotten;
 And there is none like unto Him.⁸⁴

In other words, the Qur'an condemns God's sacralisation as both son and father. As another *āyah* clarifies, 'In blasphemy indeed are those that say that God is Christ the son of Mary,'⁸⁵ as are those who patriarchalise God:

The Jews call 'Uzair a son of God, and the Christians call Christ the Son of God. That is a saying from their mouth; (in this) they but imitate what the unbelievers of old used to say; God's curse be on them: how they are deluded away from the truth.⁸⁶

The Qur'an is equally severe in its condemnation of the polytheists who, it says, 'falsely, having no knowledge, attribute to Him sons and daughters. Praise and glory be to Him! (for He is) above what they attribute to Him!'⁸⁷

However, if, as Muslims, we are required to reject God's patriarchalisation and thus God's engenderment as male, we must also reject theories of father/husband rule which draw for their legitimacy on the paradigm of divine patriarchy, for, if we cannot sacralise God as Father, we also cannot sacralise males as surrogates of a 'heavenly father.' Indeed, not only does the Qur'an forbid God's sacralisation as a literal or symbolic father or male, but it also does not, inherently or symbolically, privilege fathers and males; on the contrary, it offers a sustained critique of fathers' rule, as is clear from the Qur'anic story of Ibrāhīm as well as its definition of children's duties vis-à-vis their parents.

Ibrāhīm and Father Right

Ibrāhīm's story, as the Qur'an narrates it, is well-known in its essentials: through a dual process of critical reasoning and submission to God (Islam), Ibrāhīm arrives at the divine truth and thus eventually to a break with his father, a polytheist. The exchange between son and father, symbolising their break, perfectly illustrates the Qur'an's position on father right:

Behold, he said to his father: 'O my father! Why worship that which heareth not and seeth not, and can profit thee nothing? 'O my

father! to me hath come knowledge which hath not reached thee: *So follow me: I will guide thee to a way that is even and straight.*⁸⁸
(my emphasis)

Ibrāhīm's call to his father to follow him inverts the relationship between father and son as it is structured in traditional patriarchies, demonstrating that the Qur'an does not inherently privilege father-right. At the same time, however, it is clear that the inversion is meant to establish not Ibrāhīm's own authority over his father, but that of his God, and it is only after his father rejects God, that Ibrāhīm rejects his father. In other words, the source of Ibrāhīm's break with his father is his 'uncompromising monotheism' (seen, ironically, by feminists as the root of paternalism).

The conflict between God's rule and father's rule at the heart of the narrative on Ibrāhīm is part of a broader Qur'anic discourse about age-old resistance to God's rule by 'fathers.' Thus, when Mūsa takes God's message to the pharaoh's people, they ask him if he has 'Come to us to turn us away from the ways we found our fathers following?'⁸⁹ Similarly, when the Prophet Muḥammad takes God's message to the Arabs:

They say: 'Enough for us are the ways we found our fathers following.' What! Even though their fathers were void of knowledge and guidance?⁹⁰

The same theme emerges quite palpably in Ibrāhīm's confrontation with his people:

Behold! he said to his father and his people, 'What are these images, to which ye are (so assiduously) devoted?' They said: 'We found our fathers worshipping them.' He said, 'Indeed ye have been in manifest error – ye and your fathers.'⁹¹

Clearly, then, adherence to patriarchal traditions has kept people from God, and it is with the Qur'an's approval that Ibrāhīm attacks both these traditions and the material culture of the polytheists (the idols). And when, in retaliation, they consign him to a fire, it is God Who saves Ibrāhīm from his father and his people. It is doubtful if the moral at the heart of this story could be any clearer: Ibrāhīm's embrace of God and, in fact, the *condition* for his embrace, is his break with his father which clearly demonstrates that Islam is based in the idea of God's Rule (monotheism), not fathers' rule (traditional patriarchy). That God, not fathers, are to be obeyed is explicit also in the Qur'an's warning to believers to 'fear (the coming of) a day when no father can avail aught for his son, nor a son avail aught for his father.'⁹² (Of course, if it is true, as some of my critics maintain, that by fathers the Qur'an has in mind ancestors – that is, both fathers and mothers – then my argument is moot. But, if that is so, we should not complain that the Qur'an is a patriarchal text since, conceivably, all its

references to fathers can be extended to include mothers. On the other hand, if we do read the Qur'an's references to fathers as literal or symbolic references to men, then not only does my argument hold, but it also challenges readings of Islam as a patriarchy.)

It is in the context of the inherent conflict between monotheism and patriarchy that the Qur'an's refusal to sacralise Ibrāhīm as a literal/symbolic father also becomes significant. Thus, instead of designating Ibrāhīm as a symbolic father to the believers, the Qur'an uses the sex/gender neutral metaphor of *imām* for him. Moreover, when it counsels believers to follow Ibrāhīm and his progeny, it is in their capacity as *believers* and not in their roles as *fathers*. In other words, the Qur'an does not seek to replace the rule of unbelieving fathers (Ibrāhīm's father) with the rule of believing fathers (Ibrāhīm); rather, it seeks to displace fathers' rule by God's rule. Thus, when Ibrāhīm's progeny attest that they are following their fathers, they are attesting to following the *God* of their fathers:

Were ye witnesses when death appeared before Jacob?
Behold, he said to his sons: 'What will ye worship after me?'
They said: 'We shall worship thy God and the God of thy fathers,
Of Abraham, Ismā'īl, and Isaac, the One (True) God:
To Him we bow (in Islam).'

⁹³

That God's rule displaces fathers' rule is also borne out by the episode of Ibrāhīm's near sacrifice of his son. Thus, while exegetes read this episode as confirming Ibrāhīm's own status as a patriarch, the Qur'anic account suggests otherwise since, in the Qur'an, the sacrifice proceeds only after the son consents to it because of his own belief in God. Thus, while seeming to submit to his father (Ibrāhīm), his son is submitting to his father's (Ibrāhīm's) God. As the Qur'an narrates it:

when (the son) reached (the age of) (serious) work with him, [Ibrāhīm] said: 'O my son! I see in vision that I offer thee in sacrifice: *Now see what is thy view!*' (The son) said: 'O my father! Do as thou art commanded: Thou wilt find me, if God so wills one practising patience and constancy!' So when they had *both* submitted their wills (to God), and he had laid him prostrate on his forehead (for sacrifice), we called out to him, 'O Abraham! thou hast already fulfilled the vision!'⁹⁴ (my emphasis)

That Ibrāhīm does not assume his son's consent demonstrates both that faith is voluntary (there is no compulsion in religion, as the Qur'an teaches) and that fathers do not rule over their sons. It is the son's expressed will, not just his father's vision, that opens the way for the sacrifice which, the Qur'an clarifies, was 'obviously a trial.'

Thus, Ibrāhīm, 'the dearly beloved prophet of God, cannot dispose of his own son as he wishes, even in the name of God, until his son, at his own discretion, agrees to it. And, once again, it is God who saves a (believing) son from a (believing) father.'⁹⁵ In effect, Ibrāhīm's near-sacrifice of his son establishes the primacy of God's rule over his own rights as a father twice: once in his vision to carry out the sacrifice and once in his being prevented from doing so; on both occasions, Ibrāhīm has to subordinate his will as a father, a man, and a Muslim, to God's will; in fact, it is his submission to God's will that distinguishes him as an *imām*. However, by subordinating his will to God's, Ibrāhīm yields up his sovereignty; he thus is not sovereign in the way fathers are considered sovereign in traditional patriarchies in which the father's will not only claims to represent God's will, but also comes to *stand in* for it.

Ibrāhīm's story shows, then, that in order for God's rule to exist, the father's rule must be broken (Ibrāhīm's father) or subordinated to God's rule (Ibrāhīm as father). That is, Islam displaces both the imaginary of the father-as-ruler and also the reality of fathers' rule; submission to God, not fathers, faith, not bloodlines or kinship, says the Qur'an, is the hallmark of moral individuality. This is evident not only from Ibrāhīm's narrative and the Qur'an's definition of the 'nearest of kin to Ibrāhīm' as 'those who follow him . . . and those who believe,'⁹⁶ but also from its refusal to sacralise the Prophet Muḥammad as a symbolic father as well. Thus, the Qur'an clarifies that even though he is 'closer to the believers than their own selves,'⁹⁷ 'Muhammad is not the father of any of your men, but (he is) the Apostle of God, and the seal of the prophets.'⁹⁸ Although this *āyah* was meant to clarify the Prophet's relationship to his adopted son, its assertion that he is not a symbolic father to his people 'returns us once again to the role of fathers, and it does so by refusing to consecrate them' (Barlas, 2001). Exegetes have passed over in silence the denial of symbolic fatherhood to the Prophet, but I read it as significant and as confirming that the Qur'an opposes rule by fathers. In place of a patriarchal view of society based on notions of male rule and the privileging of blood relationships, the Qur'an teaches a view of a morally-defined society (*ummah*) based on the privileging of submission to God. Such a view, argues Mohammed Arkoun, opens up:

'an infinite space for the promotion of the individual beyond the constraints of fathers and brothers, clans and tribes, riches and tributes; the individual becomes an autonomous and free person, enjoying a liberty guaranteed by obedience and love lived within the community.'⁹⁹

In sum, the very structure of Islamic monotheism militates against the idea of fathers' rule. This is evident not only from the examples so far discussed, but also from the way in which the Qur'an describes the obligations of children to their parents.

God, Parents, and Children

An illustrative example of the Qur'an's teachings about filial obligations is offered by Q.31:14–15, which tell us that God has:

enjoined on *insan* (to be good) to his¹⁰⁰ parents: In travail upon travail did his mother bear him and in years twain was his weaning: (hear the command), 'Show gratitude to Me and to thy parents: to Me is (thy final) goal.' But if they strive to make thee join in worship with Me things of which thou hast no knowledge, then *obey them not*; yet bear them company in this life with justice (and consideration), and follow the way of those who turn to Me (in love): In the end the return of you all is to Me. . .¹⁰¹ (my emphasis)

By juxtaposing the rights of God and those of parents, these *āyāt* differentiate between what we owe God (obedience) and what we owe parents (kindness). This renders problematic God's symbolic paternity on the one hand and the father's literal deification on the other (i.e. constructions of God as Father and of fathers as associates in God's rule) by separating the rights of God and those of fathers. At the same time, the fact that the Qur'an defines *parental* and not *paternal* rights reveals that it does not accord fathers any real or symbolic privileges that it does not accord mothers. Indeed, the Qur'an counsels humans to have *taqwa* (reverence) for God and also for mothers, a word that it never applies to fathers.¹⁰² (The meaning of *taqwa* is broader than mere reverence; it is the kind of God-consciousness that is the hallmark of a true believer.)

What is significant about these *āyāt*, however, is not only their focus on the mother's role as procreator and care-giver,¹⁰³ but also the right of children to disobey parents if the latter attempt to distort their understanding of God. Since a particular view of God leads to a certain kind of moral praxis, hence to living a certain kind of life, the freedom to reach one's own understanding of divine truth means also having the freedom to lead that kind of a life. As such, this injunction cannot be read merely as allowing children space for their privately held religious beliefs within the confines of parental rule; rather, the call to disobey parents is far more momentous and it confirms at least three other fundamental Qur'anic teachings.¹⁰⁴ Firstly, it reaffirms the voluntary and intentional nature of faith; the Qur'an here clearly assumes that both daughters and sons will have the right freely to arrive at their own understanding of God. Secondly, and by the same token, it affirms that both men and women are equally free-willed moral agents, capable of making the same sorts of choices. Finally, and most crucially for the purposes of the present argument, it shows that the Qur'an assumes that both daughters and sons will, in fact, be free to disobey fathers which it would hardly call on them to do if it considered fathers' rule legitimate. On

the contrary, the Qur'an openly poses the possibility of a conflict between God's rule and fathers' rule.

Unfortunately, not only do Muslims continue to propagate theories of father right/rule, but some even hold that fathers have the right to kill their children, especially daughters.¹⁰⁵ I would like, therefore, to conclude this section by examining the Qur'an's position on the treatment of girls.

The murder or abuse of daughters became a focus in the Qur'an partly because of the nature of the abuse itself and partly because the same men who were freely killing their own daughters were ascribing daughters (and a feminine sex) to God. The Qur'an condemns both practices explicitly:

And they assign to God daughters; glory be to Him! – and they have their desire [for sons]; and when any of them is given the good tidings of a girl, his face is darkened and he chokes inwardly, as he hides . . . from the people because of the evil of the good tidings that have been given unto him; whether he shall preserve it in humiliation, or trample it into the dust. Ah, evil is that they judge! ¹⁰⁶

As this *āyah* shows, the Qur'an's condemnation of the practice of sacralising God as the father of girls does not mean that God looks down on daughters for humans. To the contrary, it refers to a girl's birth as good news and condemns her father for receiving it with aversion, and for killing her or keeping her on sufferance. Is it any wonder, then, that when the Qur'an speaks to men of their love of sons, women, and wealth – as a way of reminding them that none of these will profit them 'against God'¹⁰⁷ – that it does not refer to daughters; or that it condemns the polytheists for feminising God: 'What! For you the male sex, and for Him the female?'¹⁰⁸ However, these are not pejorative claims about women; they are reactions to negative male attitudes towards women.

The Qur'an not only condemns female infanticide and the abuse of daughters, but it also promises that on Judgement Day, God will question 'the female (infant) buried alive . . . for what crime she was killed.'¹⁰⁹ (On that day, when sons will not avail fathers, a baby girl's testimony will seal her father's fate!)¹¹⁰ There is thus no question that the Qur'an does *not* give fathers the right to kill or maltreat their daughters. To the contrary, the Qur'an establishes the right of children to:

life, disobedience, and nurturance, in particular, of the rights of girls to paternal love and care. The Qur'an is the only Scripture to address the rights of girls in such terms and to raise squarely the problem of fathers' abuse of daughters, something on which not just religious, but also secular, patriarchies and traditions frequently are silent.¹¹¹

In sum, not only does the Qur'an not teach the concept of father right/rule, but it also condemns it in various contexts. Put differently, not only does the Qur'an not invest males with the real or symbolic mantle of fatherhood, but it also does not invest fatherhood itself with real or symbolic power. Nor does it teach a theory of husband privilege as conceived in traditional patriarchies.¹¹² Any view of the father or husband as ruler, or even as head of the family, needs to be interpolated into the Qur'an, but always, I have tried to argue, in con/textually problematic ways.

Conclusion

My point in writing this paper was to show, however cursorily, that sexual inequality and discrimination do not derive from the Qur'an. And yet, as we know, Islam has become associated with both in large part because of who has read the Qur'an, how, and in what contexts. This is why many contemporary scholars have begun to emphasise the need to return 'to a fresh and immediate interpretation of the Holy Book', for it is only 'by engaging in creative *ijtihād*' (critical interpretive reasoning) that we can 'reform and renew the position of Islam on the issue of the status of women'.¹¹³ However, few Muslims, especially women, have undertaken such an exercise, for fear of angering Muslim clerics and states. However, since different readings of religious texts can yield 'fundamentally different Islams' for women,¹¹⁴ we need to be able 'to reinvestigate the normative religious texts',¹¹⁵ and in fact, to become specialists in the sacred text, as Fatima Mernissi urges women to do.¹¹⁶ This is the spirit in which I have offered my reading of the Qur'an in the hope that it will both encourage other women to reread the Qur'an for themselves as the Qur'an enjoins all believers to do, and that it will also illustrate the possibility for Muslims to struggle for sexual equality from within the framework of Qur'anic teachings. There are, of course, many who would prevent women from reading the Qur'an in an attempt to safeguard their own hegemony and privileges. However, as we know, revelation to the unlettered Prophet Muḥammad commenced with a single word, '*Iqrā!*' ('Read!') As Muslims, we are all equal inheritors of his legacy of reading.

NOTES

1 This article grew out of a paper I presented at a conference on 'The Qur'an as Text' at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 16–18 October 1999. It is based on my book, *'Believing Women' in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 2001). I have not given page numbers for quotes since the book is currently in press.

2 Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (New York: Doubleday, 1970) p. 51.

3 See Gail Ramshaw, *God beyond Gender: Feminist Christian God-Language* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995).

4 In later works, Eisenstein concedes that difference does not mean inequality. See *The Female Body and the Law* (California: University of California Press, 1988). For a review of feminist

literature that argues against confusing difference with inequality and sameness with equality see Susan J. Hekman, *Gender and Knowledge: Elements of a Postmodern Feminism* (Boston: North-Eastern University Press, 1990).

5 Zillah Eisenstein, *Feminism and Sexual Equality: Crisis in Liberal America* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1984) p. 90.

6 Neelam Hussain, 'Women as Objects and Women as Subjects within Fundamentalist Discourse.' In *Locating the Self: Perspectives on Women and Multiple Identities* eds. Nighat Khan, Rubina Saigol and Afiya Zia. (Lahore: ASR, 1994).

7 Fatima Mernissi, *Women's Rebellion and Islamic Memory* (London: Zed, 1996) pp. 13–14.

8 Josef van Ess, 'Verbal Inspiration? Language and Revelation in Classical Islamic Theology.' In *The Quran as Text* ed. Stefan Wild. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996) p. 189.

9 Q.2:228; Abdullah Yusuf Ali *The Holy Qur'an: Text, Translation and Commentary* (New York: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an, 1988). pp. 89-90.

10 Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Quran* (Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, 1980).

11 Riffat Hassan, 'An Islamic Perspective.' In *Sexuality: A Reader* ed. Karen Lebacqz (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1999).

12 Amina Wadud, *Quran and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* (Oxford: University Press, 1999).

13 Maududi. In Hassan, 'An Islamic Perspective' (1999) p. 354.

14 Q.4:34; Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'an* (1988) p. 190.

15 In Wadud, *Quran and Woman* (1999) p. 71.

16 Azizah Al-Hibri, 'A Study of Islamic Herstory: Or, How Did We Ever Get into This Mess?' *Women's Studies International Forum. Special Issue: Women and Islam*, v.5, no. 2 (Oxford: Pergamon, 1982) p. 218.

17 Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'an* (1988) p. 90 fnt 255.

18 Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur'an* (Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, 1980) p. 109 fnt 42.

19 Muhammad Abdel Haleem, *Understanding the Qur'an: Themes and Styles* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1999) p. 49.

20 Al-Hibri, *A Study of Islamic Herstory* (1982).

21 Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman* (1999).

22 Hassan, *An Islamic Perspective* (1999) pp. 355–6.

23 Mustansir Mir, *Coherence in the Quran: A Study of Islahi's Concept of Nazm in Tadabbur-i-Quran* (Indianapolis: American Trust, 1986) p. 1.

24 Mir, *Coherence in the Quran* (1986) p. 24.

25 Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman* (1999) p. 2.

26 Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago: University Press, 1982).

27 I have borrowed this term from Clovodi Boff, 'Hermeneutics: Constitution of Theological Pertinency.' In *Voice from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World* (New York: Orbis Books, 1991) p. 34.

28 This phrase is from Nicholas Wolterstorff, who uses it in another context. *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim that God Speaks* (Cambridge: University Press, 1995).

29 Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman* (1999).

30 Marshall Sahlins, *The Use and Abuse of Biology: An Anthropological Critique of Sociobiology* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1976) p. 106.

31 I have borrowed this expression from Elizabeth Grosz, *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1990).

32 There are, of course, some attributes that are unique to men in their capacity as human beings rather than, say, as angels; for instance, they have the ability to reason and make moral choices, but this ability extends also to women.

33 Some Muslim exegetes, extrapolating from the story of Yūsuf, endow women with *kayd*, allegedly a form of female guile or destructive intelligence. However, in the Qur'an, it is the husband of the woman bent upon seducing Yūsuf who uses the phrase about guile; it is not the Qur'an's idea of female nature.

34 Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman* (1999) p. xxi.

35 Sachiko Murata, *The Tao of Islam: A Sourcebook on Gender Relationships in Islamic Thought* (Albany: SUNY, 1992) p. 43.

36 Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman* (1999).

37 Asma Barlas, 'Believing Women' in *Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 2001).

38 Wadud *Qur'an and Woman* (1999) p. 35.

39 See Toril Moi who uses this phrase to indicate the relationship between sex/gender and reading. *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*. (London: Methuen, 1985).

40 Kenneth Cragg, *The Event of the Quran: Islam in its Scripture* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1994) p. 14.

41 Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman* (1999) p. 2.

42 Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of Modern Debate* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992) p. 72.

43 Ibid. p. 9.

44 I make this qualification since we can only know the nature of God's Being (divine ontology) from how God describes God (the nature of divine self-disclosure).

45 This is the central premise of hermeneutics. See Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics* (1985).

46 Ursula King, 'Introduction: Gender and the Study of Religion.' In *Religion and Gender* ed. Ursula King (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1995) p. 20.

47 The use of the words *huwwa* (he) and *hiyya* (she) is what is known as *mudhakkar wa mu'annath nahwiyyan*, i.e. a grammatical 'he' and 'she' used as a pronoun to denote any non-human organism, object, entity or concept. It does not imply gender, but is merely part of the structure of the Arabic language which, like many other languages, categorises all third person singular nouns as 'masculine' or 'feminine' without a specific pronoun to represent genderless objects/entities, etc. It cannot, therefore, be interpreted to imply that God is male. My own preference is never to masculinise God, even at a linguistic level, but these are references from the works of other scholars and I have been advised to retain them as they are.

48 Q.16:51; Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'an* (1988) p. 669.

49 Q.25:43; *ibid.* p. 935.

50 Murata, *The Tao of Islam* (1992) p. 176.

51 Barbara Daly Metcalf, (tr.) *Perfecting Women: Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi's 'Bihishti Zewar': A Partial Translation with Commentary* (California: University Press, 1990) p. 23.

- 52 Caroline Bynum, ' " . . . And Woman his Humanity" Female Imagery in the Religious Writing of the Later Middle Ages.' In *Gender and Religion: On the Complexity of Symbols* ed. Caroline Bynum, Stevan Harrell and Paula Richman (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986) p. 1.
- 53 Toshihiko Izutsu, *God and Man in the Koran: Semantics of the Koranic Weltanschauung* (Tokyo: Keio Institute of Cultural and Linguistic Studies, 1964) pp. 77; pp. 129.
- 54 Toshihiko Izutsu, *The Structure of the Ethical Terms in the Koran: A Study in Semantics* v.2 (Tokyo: Keio Institute of Philological Studies, 1959) p. 152.
- 55 Judith Antonelli, *In the Image of God: A Feminist Commentary on the Torah* (London: Jason Aronson Inc., 1995) p. xxxiii.
- 56 I make this argument in greater detail in my book, '*Believing Women in Islam*'.
- 57 Gerald O. West, ed. *Biblical Hermeneutics of Liberation: Modes of Reading the Bible in the South African Context*. (Pietermaritzburg, S.A.: Cluster Publications, 1995) p. 110.
- 58 Q.39:18; Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'an* (1988) p. 1241.
- 59 Q.7:145; *ibid.* p. 383.
- 60 This is Paul Ricoeur's definition of a text. *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation* ed. & tr. John B. Thompson. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981) p. 211.
- 61 Q.3:7; Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'an* (1988) p. 123.
- 62 Q.15:91; *ibid.* p. 653.
- 63 Q.5:14; *ibid.* p. 245.
- 64 Q.6:91; *ibid.* p. 314.
- 65 Q.3:7; *ibid.* p. 123.
- 66 See Barlas, '*Believing Women*' in *Islam* (2001) for a more detailed study of these teachings.
- 67 Unfortunately, Muslims have managed to read even into the ontology of a single Self (and into the concept of the male-female pair) oppositions and hierarchies by means of body-soul and spirit-soul dualisms in which the *nafs* is associated with a 'lower,' feminine, order. Such oppositional binaries – borrowed from the ancient Greeks and from patriarchal readings of Judaism and Christianity – are, however, unQur'anic.
- 68 Q.4:1; Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'an* (1988) p. 178.
- 69 Q.6:98; *ibid.* p. 317.
- 70 Q.7:189; *ibid.* p. 398.
- 71 Q.16:72; *ibid.* p. 675.
- 72 Q.30:21; *ibid.* p. 1056.
- 73 Q.49:13 ; *ibid.* p. 1407.
- 74 Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman* (1992).
- 75 The phrase is Margaret Hodgen's. *Early Anthropology in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1964).
- 76 Christine Amjad Ali. 'The Equality of Women: Form or Substance (I Corinthians II, 2-16).' In *Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World* ed. R.S. Sugirtharajah. (New York: Orbis Books, 1991) p. 206.
- 77 Hassan, 'An Islamic Perspective' (1999) p. 345.
- 78 *Ibid.*
- 79 Q.33:35; Yusuf Ali. *The Holy Qur'an* (1988) pp. 1116–17.

- 80 Murata, *The Tao of Islam* (1992) p. 44.
- 81 See Barlas, '*Believing Women*' in *Islam* (2001) for a discussion of the Qur'an's different treatment of women and men.
- 82 In Gail Ramshaw, *God beyond Gender: Feminist Christian God-Language* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995) p. 77.
- 83 Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Public Man, Private Woman: Women in Social and Political Thought* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981) p. 213.
- 84 Q.112; Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'an* (1988) p. 1806.
- 85 Q.5:19; *ibid.* pp. 246–7.
- 86 Q.9:30; *ibid.* p. 448.
- 87 Q.6:100–1; *ibid.* p. 319.
- 88 Q.19:42–3; *ibid.* p. 776.
- 89 Q.10:78; *ibid.* p. 504.
- 90 Q.5:107; *ibid.* p. 275.
- 91 Q.21:52–54; *ibid.* p. 834.
- 92 Q.31:33; *ibid.* p. 1089.
- 93 Q.2:133; *ibid.* pp. 54–5.
- 94 Q.37:102–3; *ibid.* pp. 1204–5.
- 95 Barlas, '*Believing Women*' in *Islam* (2001).
- 96 Q.3:68; *ibid.* p. 140.
- 97 Q.33:6; *ibid.* p. 1104.
- 98 Q.33:40; *ibid.* p. 1119.
- 99 M. Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam: Common Questions, Uncommon Answers* tr. Robert D. Lee. (Oxford: Westview Press, 1994) p. 57.
- 100 Clearly, this verse is inclusive of women.
- 101 Q.31:14–15; Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'an* (1988) p1083.
- 102 Q.4:1; *ibid.* p. 178. The word *arḥām* can be translated as 'wombs' and therefore understood to mean 'the mothers who bore you'.
- 103 See Barlas, '*Believing Women*' in *Islam* (2001), for why this veneration is different from patriarchal glorifications of motherhood.
- 104 See *ibid.* for why this injunction applies also to believing parents.
- 105 In a *60 Minutes* documentary on Iran aired on May 10, 1998, a cleric allegedly claimed that a father who had killed his daughter had acted in accordance with Islam's teachings. However, the Qur'an does not give parents the right to kill their children. This is in contrast to a tradition in the Torah that rowdy sons could be put to death on their parents' consent. See Judith Antonelli, *In the Image of God: A Feminist Commentary on the Torah* (London: Jason Aronson Inc. 1995).
- 106 Q.16:55–60; A.J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted* (New York: Allen and Unwin, 1955) p. 292.
- 107 Q.58:17; Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'an* (1988) p. 1516.
- 108 Q.53:21; *ibid.* p. 1445.
- 109 Q.81:8–9; *ibid.* p. 1694.

- 110 Exegetes who argue that the Qur'an attaches less significance to a woman's evidence than it does to a man's should consider the implications of this *āyah* for their own views.
- 111 Barlas, '*Believing Women' in Islam* (2001).
- 112 Inasmuch as the rights that husbands claim in traditional patriarchies flow from their status as fathers, the Qur'an's treatment of fathers also impinges on the husband's rights.
- 113 Barbara Stowasser, 'The Status of Women in Early Islam.' In *Muslim Women* ed. Freda Hussain. (New York: St. Martin's, 1984) p. 38.
- 114 Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam* (1992) p. 71.
- 115 El-Solh, C. Fawzi and Judy Mabro, eds. *Muslim Women's Choices: Religious Belief and Social Reality* (Oxford: Berg, 1994) p. 18.
- 116 Mernissi, *Women's Rebellion and Islamic Memory* (1986).